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TELANGANA GETS NOD TO TEST DRONES FOR VACCINE DELIVERY

The state has to meet the Centre's conditions to begin trials by May-end for delivery beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS)

FASTER DELIVERY, IMPROVED ACCESS STRATEGY

The approval is part of the Centre's strategy to enhance the scope of drone usage in the country to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. On April 30, the state government was permitted to use drones for experimental delivery of shots within the visual line of sight. The ministry said this would serve its dual plan of ensuring faster vaccine delivery and improved healthcare access

WILL HAVE TO SUBMIT REPORT TO CENTRE

- On April 22, the Indian Council for Medical Research was granted conditional exemption for a similar experiment with IIT-Kanpur
- One of the conditions laid down by the Centre mandates that drone operations shall be limited between sunrise and sunset
- After trials, the state will submit a Proof of Concept to the Centre

400 feet
IS THE HEIGHT PERMITTED FOR THE DRONES TO FLY DURING THE TEST RUNS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TRICHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Top Court forms task force to formulate ways to scientifically allocate oxygen

Team to get six-months tenure, will draw resources from Centre for consultation, work out modalities

KANU SARDA @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Saturday constituted a 12-member national task force to formulate a methodology for scientific allocation of medical oxygen to all states and Union Territories. The order comes in the backdrop of several states complaining about an acute oxygen shortage and blaming the Centre for not providing sufficient quantum.

Initially, the task force would get a six-month tenure, with the Centre nominating two nodal officers, who would arrange logistics, including communication with members, and virtual meetings of the task force.

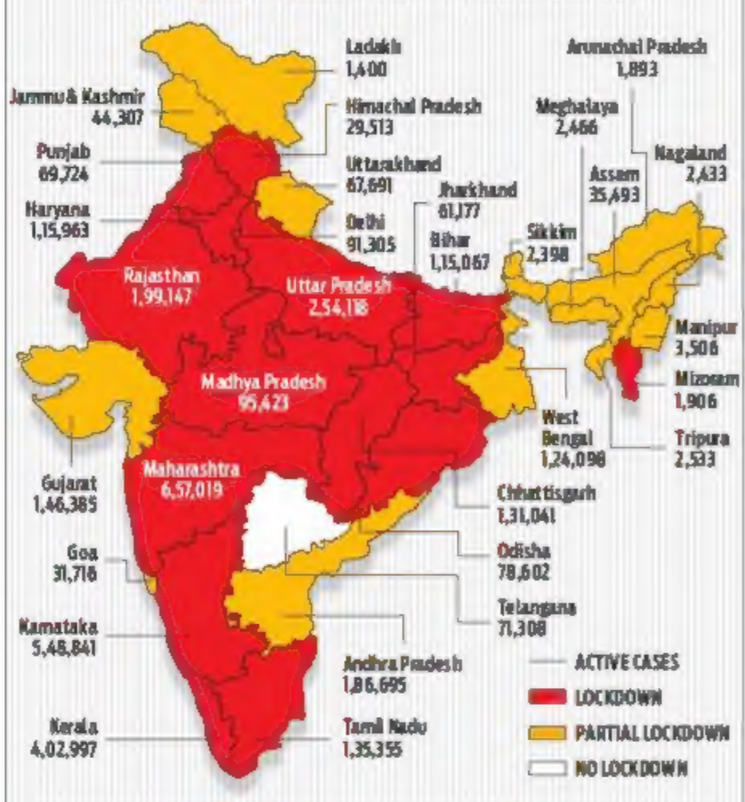
In the 24-page order, a bench, comprising Justices D Y Chandrachud and M R Shah, said the taskforce shall draw upon the human resources of the Union Government for consultation and information. It would also be free to formulate its modalities and procedures for working. "The rationale for constituting a task force at the national level is to facilitate a public health response to the pandemic based on scientific and specialised knowledge," the order read.

The court said that a consensus had emerged on the need for ensuring allotment of medical oxygen on a scientific, rational and equitable basis and suggested that an expert body of renowned national experts with diverse experience in health institutions be formed.

The Central and state governments shall provide complete and real-time data for facilitating the work of the task force as and when necessary. "All private hospitals and other healthcare institutions shall co-operate with the task force. We expect that the leading experts in the country shall associate with the work of the task force both as members and resource persons. This will facilitate a meeting of minds and the formulation of scientific strategies to deal with an unprecedented human crisis," it said.

EXPRESS MAPS
MOST OF INDIA SHUT DOWN

Map shows level of restrictions and the active case load across states



NO BAR ON ESSENTIALS

Pharmacies, shops selling groceries and vegetables, and takeaway food services are usually allowed in lockdown, though with some restriction on timing. Also, essential services such as telecom, cable TV, media are also allowed to operate as usual (check sidebar for more details)

WHAT'S ALLOWED

KARNATAKA
- Getting groceries on foot till 10 am. Food takeaway till 9 pm.
- Standalone bars and liquor stores (6-10 am)
- Milk booths, shops selling essentials (6-10 am). Veg pushcarts
- Home delivery of food, e-commerce, essentials
- Flights and trains. Cabs to and from airport and rail stations
- Pharmacies, fuel stations, banks

TAMIL NADU
Milk supply, courier services, fuel outlets, Amma canteens
- Shops selling essentials (grocery, vegetable, meat, and fish) can function till 12 pm without running AC

KERALA
Essential, emergency travel
- Medical shops. Restaurants (takeaway and delivery)
- Banks on Monday, Wednesday and Friday
- Inter-state travel on e-pass. Weddings & funerals with 20 attendees max

AP
Govt offices (8-11:30 am)
- Essential services
- Unhindered travel for Covid-19 management duties

DELHI, UP, HARYANA, J&K, RAJASTHAN
Essential shops

TELANGANA
Essential shops, Emergency travel
- Marriage and funeral attendance with ceiling

JHARKHAND
Essential shops, select govt & private offices
- Industry, construction, agricultural and mining

CHHATTISGARH
Essential shops, restaurants
- Banks and post offices

BIHAR
Home delivery from 9 am to 9 pm
- Weddings, funerals with ceiling on attendees

PUNJAB
Essential shops, travel with negative report
- Government offices with 50% staff
- Agriculture, grocery, hardware items and liquor till 5 pm on weekdays

ODISHA
Essential shops till noon on weekdays. Travel of 500 metres from homes
- Weddings and funerals within ceiling

MP
Essential and emergency services. Time window for shops to operate (varying duration)
- Govt offices, industries

DISTRICTS FIGHT IT OUT AS COVID-19 CASES SPIKE ACROSS K'TAKA

K SHIVA KUMAR @ Mysuru

WITH the massive surge in Covid-19 cases, Karnataka, which has 5.49 lakh active infections, is the second-most affected state in the country after Maharashtra, where thousands are battling for life amid an acute shortage of liquid medical oxygen (LMO).

The local administration everywhere is scrambling every day to get enough supplies, leading to oxygen wars between different districts. Even ministers are reaching out to oxygen plants to ensure adequate supplies to the districts they are in charge of.

This has become more accentuated after the deaths of 24 patients at the Chamarajnagar District Hospital due to oxygen shortage. The incident immediately sparked a war of words with Chamarajanagar Deputy Commissioner M R Ravi pointing fingers at Mysuru DC Rohini Sindhuri for 'rationing and restricting' oxygen supply to the neighbouring district. The turn of events compelled the State Government and Karnataka Lokayukta to order separate inquiries into the entire episode.

Over the last three days, oxygen supply to Chamarajanagar district has improved, meeting the requirement of 3.5 kilo litres per day after District In-charge Minister S Suresh Kumar visited the oxygen plants. The situation has come to such a pass that Mysuru-Kodagu MP Prathap Simha has now appealed to the government to fix a quota of oxygen for Mysuru and neighbouring districts to end the tensions and ensure that Mysuru is not blamed for any shortages.

While Mysuru district's estimated requirement is 44-48 metric tons per day, it is supplied 24-28 MTs from four refilling plants.

In neighbouring Mandya district, the daily requirement is 15-17 Kl per day, but it is being supplied with 10-12 kl once in two days. After District In-Charge Minister Narayana Gowda visited some oxygen plants, local MLAs and the MP have raised objection to him taking away cylinders when there are more than 2,000 beds in the district and plans are afoot to increase it to 7,000 oxygenated beds. P5

STATEWIDE	MAY 7	MAY 8
Fresh cases	48,781	47,563
Recoveries	28,623	34,881
Deaths	592	482

Amidst the soaring demand for oxygen across the country, a man carries an empty cylinder to be refilled with the life-saving gas at Peenya in Bengaluru | SHRIRAM BN

IMA roasts Centre for case explosion, lockdown hesitancy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

HAD the Centre heeded to the experts' advice and gone for a complete lockdown, the country could have been spared the huge uptick in cases, said the Indian Medical Association (IMA) in a strongly-worded statement on Saturday. Calling the Centre's handling of the pandemic "extremely lethargic", the IMA said the Centre's decisions were rarely in sync with the ground realities as it largely ignored the suggestions made by health professionals.

Blaming the Centre for the surge, the IMA said a national lockdown of at least 10-15 days was necessary as it would have given the struggling healthcare infrastructure breathing space to "recoup and replenish both the material and the manpower". It also dismissed individual lockdowns and night curfews by states as ineffective in breaking the chain.

The IMA lashed out at the Health Ministry for not charting out a roadmap for implementation of phase 3 of vaccine rollout. It said many centres had suspended the drive due to lack of stock. It was also critical of the Centre's differential pricing system for purchases made by states and private hospitals. Recalling the country's success against smallpox and polio, the IMA said the victory against the dreaded diseases was made possible only through free vaccination.

The medical body also came down heavily on the government for the logistics issues leading to a shortage of medical oxygen despite the country being self-sufficient in production. It also questioned the government data on the number of new cases and mortalities, asking why the actual Covid-19 statistics was not being released. Citing an example of false RT-PCR negative tests, the IMA said that authorities were not adding cases traced through CT scan.

DRDO drug approved

An anti-Covid oral drug developed by the DRDO has been approved by the DCGI for emergency use as an adjunct therapy in moderate to severe cases. Clinical trials of the drug showed it helps in faster recovery and reduces supplemental dependence on oxygen | P7

State will add 20K more oxygenated beds: DyCM

FROM ACROSS THE STATE

Experts say houses and apartments stocking up oxygen cylinders, preparing for any eventuality

Hubballi district administration forms rapid oxygen supply team to help make the gas available at hospitals

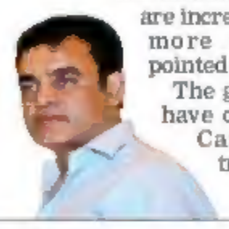
Two Covid Care Centres were opened in Kalaburagi district on Saturday

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

WITH the supply of oxygen to treat Covid-19 patients set to increase from 965 metric tons to 1,200 metric tons after the Supreme Court refused to act on a Karnataka High Court order mandating the quantity, the State Government is now preparing to increase the number of oxygenated beds. Deputy Chief Minister and Covid Task Force Chairman Dr C N Ashwath Narayan said 20,000 oxygenated beds will be added across the state to treat Covid-19 patients.

Measures are being taken immediately to add 10,000 oxygenated beds to overcome the shortage, the DyCM told reporters in Bengaluru on Saturday. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, the oxygen demand was around 100 MT a day which has increased to 965 MT. As the cases are increasing, there is a need to add more oxygenated beds, he pointed out.

The government has decided to have oxygenated beds in Covid Care Centres and depute trained staff at the CCCs.



CONTINUED ON: P3

CCB NETS GAS CO STAFFER FOR SELLING O_2 IN BLACK

BENGALURU: Officers of the Central Crime Branch on Friday raided the premises of Siga Gases Pvt Ltd located in the Peenya industrial area here, and arrested the branch in-charge for allegedly selling oxygen cylinders in the black market. The accused, Ravi Kumar (36), had joined the company 10 years ago. Kumar was allegedly charging ₹3,000 for a cylinder of 47-litre capacity, while the government rate for the same is ₹300. P5

BIG LOSS

MK KAUSHIK LOSES BATTLE

1980 Olympic gold medallist and former national coach MK Kaushik died on Saturday after battling Covid-19 for the past three weeks. He was 66 and is survived by his son and wife | PTI

Hospitalisation norms relaxed

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

IN view of the difficulty being faced by Covid patients in getting timely medical care, the Centre on Saturday removed the requirement for positive test report for hospitalisation in both government and private hospitals.

The move comes after many instances of hospitals turning away even critical patients for want of test reports. The revised policy says no patient will be refused services for any reason.

The Union Health Ministry said admissions must be based on need and that beds can't be occupied by persons who don't need hospitalisation.

The Centre has asked the chief secretaries of all states to issue necessary orders within three days to enforce the new policy.

LOCKDOWN RELIEF

Pharma companies, large factories are now essential services

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

THE Department of Commerce & Industries (C&I) has further given exemption to some more industrial establishments to function amid the 14-day lockdown-like restrictions in the State, beginning May 10. They have now been classified as essential services, Additional Chief Secretary, C&I, Dr Rajkumar Khatri said on Saturday.

All units manufacturing drugs, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, medical oxygen, their packing materials, raw material and intermediates will operate.

Food processing units and related industries, cold storage and warehousing services, manufacturing units of essential commodities, production of which requires continuous process, industrial establishments and production units operating with in-situ staff and workers are also allowed to function.

Also, effluent treatment plants, petroleum refineries, large steel plants, sugar mills, rice mills, oil mills, roller flour mills, bakeries and confectionaries, agro-based industries, fish and poultry feed, large cement plants, large foundries, fertilisers and tyre manufacturing plants, automobile industry and vertically integrated large textile units are among those which will remain open throughout the restrictions. All other industries will remain shut during the lockdown.

The government has also permitted marriages that are already scheduled. They have to be "conducted at their respective homes in a low-key manner" with close family members up to 40 people and after securing permission from the BBMP officers or tahsildars in districts, said Principal Secretary, Revenue and Member Secretary, State Executive Committee, N Manjunatha Prasad.

EXPRESS READ

Indian virus variant found in B'desh, Lanka

Dhaka/Colombo: Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have reported the first cases of the Indian variant of coronavirus, also known as B.1.617, prompting authorities to exercise caution to contain its spread. Both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are experiencing a surge in the coronavirus cases. In its report, the WHO had said the Indian strain of coronavirus has been found in at least 17 countries.

Not being apprised of situation, WB Guv upset

Kolkata: West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday expressed displeasure at not being updated on the law and order situation in the state with regard to post-poll violence by the Chief Secretary and DGP. "Unfortunately both came without any paper or reports sought. Directed them to send the same without delay. In a sense disgusted with such stance," he tweeted.